Auth. Laxman singh [Ph.D.] email –laxman1378@gmail.com

Book Review: "Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis"

Western scholars have played a significant role in developing Indology, and one such scholar is George Weston Briggs. Briggs wrote a book on the Nathpanthis, a cult in India, in the last century. The book, "Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis," explores the history and practices of this cult.

The Nathpanthis are widespread in North India, with Gorakhpur being their major center. The cult was founded by Guru Gorakhnath, whose origins are shrouded in mystery. However, it is believed that he hailed from the Punjab region. The Nathpanthis consider Hinglaj in Sindh (now in Pakistan) as their most sacred place.

The Kanphata Yogis, another name for the Nathpanthis, are known for their large ear piercings, which often tear their ears. They wear earrings made of rhinoceros horn, a practice also followed by Sikh Guru Gobind Singh.

The book explores the mythology surrounding Gorakhnath and the Nathpanthis' yogic practices. According to legend, Gorakhnath was a Vajrayani Buddhist who was influenced by the Shakti sect through Guru Matsyendranath. Matsyendranath is revered in Nepal, and a myth surrounds his relationship with a queen and his eventual departure with his two sons, Nem Nath and Parshvanath.

The book also discusses the Nathpanthis' ascetic practices, including their ability to withstand extreme cold. However, the review notes that the book overlooks important aspects, such as the connection between the Gorakhnath tradition and Nepal, and the relationship between the Gorakha state and Gorakhnath.

The review also raises questions about Briggs' motivations, suggesting that his study might have been aimed at facilitating Christian missionary work, given his comments on the potential for converting the Chamar community to Christianity.